

Holy Trinity Sunningdale
Sunday September 26, 2021
Reading – Mark 9:38-50

Our reading today has some of the most chilling warnings that Jesus ever gave. Mark 9:38-50 has 3 sections which may initially appear unrelated and some commentators have said that these teachings may originally have been given at different times and in different places. The coherence comes if and when we consider this passage in the light of Jesus giving us 3 priorities we must get right to be part of his kingdom.

Our Priority 1 – is about working with others to build the kingdom of God:

In Verses 38 – 41, John complains that someone outside the “in” group was doing kingdom work. It is kind of odd that this unnamed man is having success driving out demons when the disciples were not! Last Sunday, Gilly beautifully examined with us the disciples’ argument about who will be the greatest in the kingdom. Human nature is all about gaining power then keeping others from having it. The disciples were jealous of a man who healed in Jesus’ name. Apparently, John felt that only they should have the ability to wield Jesus’ power. Just imagine the scene: “Demon, you get back into that man, this person doesn’t have the credentials to drive you out!”

It might seem absurd to imagine that but, we do the same today when we refuse to be part of worthy causes because

1. The people are not from our denomination
2. The people involved are not those we feel most comfortable with
3. The people don’t do things in the way we are used to
4. Our efforts won’t get enough recognition

Let’s examine Jesus’ response. Jesus says that he approves of not only people who do good works in his name to others, but also those who perform acts of kindness to his people - those who belongs to the Messiah. Therefore, those who share a common faith in Christ should cooperate and support one another. We should not let our differences interfere in the goal of building the kingdom of God. This illustrates another truth – that it is the name of Jesus that holds the power, not the person using it. It’s not a magic incantation. But Jesus’ name accompanied by trust in Jesus works miracles.

Our Priority 2 – is understanding greatness by God’s standards:

First, **Verses 42 – 48** tells us that - Whoever welcomes a child, welcomes Jesus; whoever gives a cup of cold water to someone in need is doing the same as giving an offering to God. By contrast, doing things that harm or hurt others or failing to care for them is a sin. Then these verses give stark warnings on the consequences of sin. Jesus says that it is so important to get rid of sin that if your hand, foot or eye is causing you to sin, you would be better off without them. With our hands, we do violence; with our feet, we walk into places we shouldn’t go; with our eyes, we see what is not ours leading to envy, lust and stealing etc. Celebrities go to great lengths to insure various parts of their bodies – Mariah Carey – the singer, insures her vocal cords for \$35million and another \$35million for her legs! The food critic, Egon Ronay even insured his taste buds! We may think that’s ridiculous but most of us would

consider it an utter disaster to lose a hand, a foot or an eye. But on Jesus' scale of priorities, that loss is nothing compared to losing our chance of eternal life.

What do we use as our measure of greatness – personal achievement or service to others? Jesus says we must be freed from the basic human nature which runs counter to the character of God. In our relationship with Jesus, any attitude or action that compromises that relationship should be pushed away. Our thoughts and actions must be motivated by love, we must be careful about judging others and we must always make our choices from an eternal perspective.

Our Priority 3 – is on the characteristics of those who live in the kingdom of God:

Salt, in the days of Jesus is an absolute necessity. **In Verses 49 & 50**, Jesus uses salt to illustrate 3 of the special and distinctive characteristics that should be found in people who follow him.

1. Salt when used with a sacrifice recalls God's covenant with his people. Therefore, as Christians, we must always remember God's faithfulness.
2. Salt has no need to look like any other ingredient, it has no aroma like other condiments but without it, food is tasteless. As salt adds flavour to food, we as Christians, should make a difference to the flavour of the world we live in.
3. Salt preserves food from decay. To keep food edible, you must have salt, therefore as Christians, we should counteract the moral decay in our society.

This morning, Jesus is saying, you are my people and you have the quality of saltiness which is special and distinctive. Don't ever lose that. Don't become bland and dull. Live a life that is flagrantly different from the priorities that this world thinks are important. Live your lives with the desire to salt the earth with the love and message of God.

Let us pray:

Lord, help us to step into the world with a deeper understanding of your intimate love for us and for others. Father God, please give us the opportunity and the enablement to demonstrate your love to someone this week. Amen.

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